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ABSTRACT

An approach to teaching integrated language skills in adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) instruction is described. The technique uses a combination of classroom drama and role-playing, writing about the event, revision, publication, and follow-up activities to develop speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. Eight stages are defined and explained: (1) selection of a topic (e.g., a robbery), background preparation, and role assignment; (2) enactment, involving all class members and teacher; (3) student assumption of the roles of journalists to report the event; (4) first draft of a report; (5) second draft; (6) final draft; (7) "publication" in a school newspaper, on a bulletin board, or through class reading; and (8) follow-up activities. Suggestions for incorporating a cultural component are given, and a sampling of possible drama scenarios (robbery, wedding, fire, kidnapping) and related props is offered. The worksheet used to stimulate student ideas for writing, and a form for debriefing students about the event and the writing exercise are also included. (MSE)

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Eliminating Fear of the Blank Page: A Thematic Approach

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LEVEL: ADULT (#2305)

TESOL '95 Poster Presentation

"ELIMINATING FEAR OF THE BLANK PAGE: A Thematic Approach"
aka
Squeezing the CA Dept. of Education's 1992 ESL Model Standards for Adult Education Programs Into One Tidy Package

While a major outcome of this lesson is elimination of (or a significant reduction of) "fear of the blank page," this is actually a student-centered, communication-based lesson which integrates the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Various instructional activities have been incorporated in order to address different learning styles: aural, oral, visual, and kinesthetic.

Topics should be chosen based on your students' needs/goals (see Part VI: "debriefing"), and your school district's course outlines.

PART I: PREPARATION (focus on development of receptive skills prior to development of productive skills)

a) Choose a topic (e.g., a robbery) and gather props.
b) Announce the topic, elicit pertinent vocabulary from the students (e.g., gun, ski mask, stocking mask), and put these on the chalkboard. Add to the students' list and work on any pronunciation problems. (This is a great time to teach physical descriptions.)
c) Students read a newspaper article about the topic, discuss it, and then do a dictation on it. Variation: Students listen to an audio tape of a "robbery" drama, then answer teacher-generated questions/summarize/discuss it.
c) Assign roles. For an element of surprise, which adds immensely to the fun of this activity, privately brief a few of the "players" and hand out the props.

PART II: THE DRAMA (aka, THE FUN)

Try to get everyone involved. It is usually possible to have all the students assume a role. For example, in "The Wedding," those who are not members of the wedding party or clergy are wedding guests. In "The Fire," those who are not victims, paramedics, or members of the media are rubberneckers.

In order to keep the action going, and the students communicating, the teacher assumes one of the roles in the drama. This enables him/her to serve as facilitator whenever there is a lull in the unfolding drama.

PART III: POST DRAMA (aka BACK AT THE NEWSPAPER)

It's now time for the players to put on another hat: that of journalist.

a) Teacher distributes, then reviews the "Five W's & How" work sheet with the class.

b) Using the given examples as a guideline, "journalists," aka students, complete and sign their respective work sheets and then exchange papers with another student for peer review and discussion. The peer reviewer signs his partner's work sheet as "copy editor."

PART IV: FIRST DRAFT

Using the edited work sheet, the journalist writes his first draft, then returns to his "editor" for a discussion of 1) content (which, thanks to the aid of the edited work sheet, is probably in top form); 2) organization; 3) errors that interfere with comprehensibility.

PART V: SECOND DRAFT

"Journalist" completes second draft, then return to his "editor" to verify that all points from the editorial meeting have been addressed. If so, the "editor" initials the corresponding blanks on the journalist's work sheet. Time permitting, the discussion may then--by mutual consent of both "editor" and "journalist"--progress to one of minor errors.

PART VI: FINAL COPY

Using info obtained from the second editorial meeting, the "journalist" writes his final copy, completes the debriefing, attaches his work sheet, and turns the entire package in to the "Editor-in-Chief," (aka teacher).

PART VII: PUBLICATION

The "Editor-in-Chief" reviews the copy, makes notes, and selects some stories for publication (Time and paper allowing, these stories may find their way into the school newspaper; otherwise, display on a bulletin board will suffice). Variation: Volunteers read their stories to the class.

PART VIII: THE LESSON CONTINUES

The information garnered from the debriefing is used in teacher-generated lessons, or to match students of contrasting abilites for peer teaching.

CULTURAL COMPONENT

Multiple dramas may sometimes be done on the same topic (e.g., "The Wedding"). Students from shared cultural backgrounds could take turns putting on presentations. The final presentation would be a traditional American wedding. The final outcome would be a comparison/contrast report, either verbal or written.

WARNING:

Obtaining props can be habit-forming. Don't bankrupt yourself in the process. Start your search in your own garage, attic, basement, backyard, closets, and especially your child's toy box--a real treasure trove.

Beg/borrow props from neighbors, friends and students.

Hit the swap meets, garage sales, and thrift shops.

Set up a "prop swap" with other teachers.

If you're located on a campus that has a drama department, get to know the director. Who knows what goodies this new friend may be able to, at least temporarily, throw your way?

REMEMBER: This is not a multi-million dollar production for the "big screen." A few judiciously chosen props and wardrobe pieces are enough to set the mood.

A SAMPLING OF DRAMAS AND POSSIBLE PROPS/WARDROBE PIECES

"THE ROBBERY"

stocking masks (from old pantyhose); ski mask (I borrowed my son's several years ago. He's probably still wondering where he lost it.); plastic grocery bag (recycling is "in"); play money (from a board game); plastic sheriff's badge, guns and handcuffs (child's toy box); hooded windbreaker (local thrift shop)

"THE WEDDING"

cleric's collar (white cardboard insert from a new shirt); cleric's missal (any small book will do); groom's top hat (party supply store); bride's veil (lace doily/mantilla borrowed from a student); wedding party's flowers (fashioned from facial tissue); ring bearer's pillow (decorator pillow from your couch); plastic champagne glasses (party supply store)

"911: A FIRE"

plastic fire hat (five and dime store); yellow rain slicker; fire hose (garden hose); media I.D. (plastic traveler's check wallets); first aid kit (from your bathroom or car); blanket for victim (I use an old beach blanket); a disconnected phone (We don't want the students inadvertently reaching 911 in the heat of the excitement.)

"911: MY BABY HAS BEEN KIDNAPPED"

a disconnected phone (see above); baby's prop (stuffed animal/lollipop); kidnapper's clothing (see "Robbery" above); an apron and spatula for "Dad" and a pair of coveralls and a wrench for "Mom" (this one is a stereotype buster)

I won't go on and on. The above sampling should be enough to get your creative juices flowing.

Remember to use concrete details

THE "FIVE W's & HOW" WORK SHEET

WHO (+ a physical description or an appositive)
Example: Kim Nguyen, son of a prominent plastic surgeon,

WHAT
Example: robbery/ robbed a bank/ held up a bank

WHERE
Example: Teacher's Credit Union in North Park

WHEN
Example: Friday, March 13

WHY
Example: needed money for school tuition

HOW
Example: by entering through an air-condtioning duct

_____ _____
(journalist) (copy editor)

1)_____ 2)_____ 3)_____

Using your edited "Five W's & How" work sheet, write _____paragraph(s) about today's drama.

_____
(Title--Use upper and lower case)

by

_____
(your byline)

DEBRIEFING:

THE DRAMA

1. Today's drama was _____. (fun, boring, interesting...)
2. The part I liked the best was _____
_____.
3. The part I liked the least was _____
_____.
4. Next, I would like to do a drama about _____
_____.
5. If we did a drama about _____,
I could lend you a(n) _____. (optional)

THE WRITING

1. The part I found the easiest was _____
_____.
2. The part I found the most difficult was _____
_____.